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FOR NEA/IPA KURT MEDLAND AND NEA/ELA

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [KWBG](#) [KPAL](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: SYRIAN EQUITIES IN ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN SECURITY ARRANGEMENTS

REF: STATE 34850

Classified By: CDA Michael Corbin for reasons 1.4 b and d.

¶1. (S) Summary: Syria's primary security interests in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are to avoid a war with Israel that would threaten the Asad family's hold on power and to win Israel's return of the occupied Golan Heights to the 1967 border lines. As the self-proclaimed center of Arab resistance to Israeli occupation, Syria's support of Hamas and other Palestinian rejectionist groups is generally popular with the Syrian street and a long-standing constant of Syrian policy. In addition to a means to pressure Israel, Syria's support of Hamas and other rejectionist groups reflect the ruling Alawite minority's desire to be seen as supporting Sunni Arab causes. At the same time, Syria is aware of Israeli red-lines and has generally restrained Palestinian groups from launching terrorist operations or claiming credit for them from Syrian Soil. End Summary

Pol/Mil Equities and Security Interests Related to a Two-State Solution

¶2. (S) Still in a state of war with Israel, Syria's primary equities in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are to avoid renewed hostilities with Israel that would threaten the Asad regime and to win Israel's return of the occupied Golan Heights. Syria's assertion that it would not attend the November 2007 Annapolis conference unless the agenda included discussion of the Golan Heights issue was the most recent example of Syria's insistence on its interests being addressed in any Israeli-Palestinian peace talks. Indeed, the SARG has consistently maintained its opposition to any Israeli/Palestinian peace, including a two-state solution or movement on the Israel/Lebanon track, that was not developed in the context of a peace initiative that includes an Israeli withdrawal from the Golan Heights to the 1967 border lines.

Security Arrangements with Israel

¶3. (C) The 1974 Separation of Forces Agreement between Israel and Syria represents the principal security

arrangement between both countries. The agreement, while technically not ending the Yom Kippur War, provided for an area of separation and for two equal zones of limited forces and armaments on both sides of the line of separation and called for a cease-fire between the two countries. The United Nations Disengagement Observer Force (UNDOF) was established to observe the cease-fire and to supervise the implementation of the agreement. The details of this security agreement have been enforced by both countries. Though minor violations are continuously recorded by UNDOF, the area of separation between Israeli occupied Golan Heights and Syria has been Israel's quietest border for 30 years.

¶4. (S) As President Bashar al-Assad alluded to in an April 19 speech to the Syrian Baath Central Committee, Syria and Israel have exchanged messages, through Turkey, on the possibility of resuming negotiations, but Syria insists that such talks occur on its terms. The Turks and other interlocutors have facilitated back-channel dialogue between Syria and Israel. Our Syrian interlocutors insist Israel has also used the Turkish channel to warn Syria that a Hizballah attack on Israeli targets in retaliation for the February 2008 killing of Hizballah Imad Mugniyah would result in Israeli military action against Syria.

Security Assistance Given/Sales to Israel

¶5. (SBU) Post is not aware of any bilateral assistance/sales of any kind between Israel and Syria.

Security Arrangements with the PA/Security Assistance Given to the PA

¶6. (S) While Syria has hosted Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas, most recently at the March 28-30 Arab League Summit, we are not aware of any security arrangements between the PA and SARG or of any security assistance provided by the SARG to the PA.

Syria's Role as Spoiler/Relationship with Other Potential Spoilers

¶7. (S) The self-appointed center of "Arab resistance," Syria's political support for Hizballah and Palestinian rejectionist groups in their fight with Israel is well documented. A wide body of reporting indicates the SARG has been facilitating the rearming of Hizballah since the 2006 hostilities between Hizballah and Israel.

¶8. (S) Syria views its relationship with Hamas as a key source of pressure, and it jealously guards this relationship because of the Hamas threat to Israel. Syria occasionally defers to Egypt (and to some extent Saudi Arabia) on working with Hamas. Syria's relationship with Khalid Mashal is sometimes a source of friction between Iran and Syria because of Iran's efforts to establish closer ties with Hamas. Some observers argue that the January 2008 Palestinian rejectionist conference in Syria was a direct reaction to an Iranian push to host the conference in Tehran against Syrian desires.

¶9. (S) The SARG's continued political and material support to Hizballah and the political support to Palestinian terrorist groups such as Hamas, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine, and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine - General Command, in effect put Syria in a position to act as a key spoiler to any Israeli/Palestinian peace settlement. Absent perceived movement on the return of the Golan, the SARG could work to undermine Israeli/Palestinian peace negotiations in any number of ways:

-- The SARG could encourage Hizballah, Hamas or other rejectionist groups to step up terror operations against Israel;

-- It could ratchet up material support to these groups;

-- Syria could publicly criticize any Palestinian concessions in the event of a peace deal; and/or

-- Syria could obstruct the holding of a referendum among Palestinian refugees in Syria or use its influence to defeat such a vote.

Redlines Related to Security in the Context of a Two-State Solution

¶10. (S) While Syria (and Iran) use terrorist groups to fight a proxy war with Israel, the SARG manages relations with them in such a way so as to avoid all out war with the Israelis. Put another way, the SARG will push these groups to subvert a separate peace only to a point. The SARG will likely continue to prevent any terrorist operations from being carried out from Syrian territory. Syria will also likely not allow the groups/individuals that are operating here from publicly claiming responsibility for such operations while on Syrian soil.

¶11. (S) Though some evidence suggests terrorist operations may have planned within Syria's borders, the SARG will likely continue to avoid direct participation in such planning so as to maintain a measure of plausible deniability. The SARG is concerned by Israeli public comments and private warnings suggesting that a new conflict with Hizballah would not be confined to Lebanon. However, a mistake or miscalculation by

Syria or Hizballah holds the potential to lead to large scale hostilities with little warning, as was seen in the summer of 2006 in Lebanon.

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